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Culture, a vector for development in the Southern Mediterranean region

- *Bringing culture from the margins to the centre of the public sphere*
- *Cultural industries: how they contribute to economic development*
- *Culture and social inclusion*

Key note speech: Ferdinand Richard, Chairman, Roberto Cimetta Fund (15')

Experts:

Ammar Kessab, Senior Governance Specialist, African Development Bank (10')

Antonio Lázaro Gozalo, Director, Instituto Cervantes Amman (10')

Ouafa Belgacem, CEO and Co-founder, Culture Funding Watch (10')

Fatin Farhat, Independent Art Operator and Researcher (10')

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“The impact of Culture in the Southern Mediterranean Region”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In order to consider Culture as the vector of development in the Southern Mediterranean region, I would like to recall five evidences:

1 - In our shared space, we are today facing an on-going attempt to re-nationalise Culture and Arts. Culture and Arts are now considered an ultimate tool for national sovereignties, a branding device for smart cities, a communication tool for mass-tourism. A growing consequence of this is the festivalisation of Culture, the reduction of critical narratives and experimentations, self-censorship... All in all, independent producers are more often considered as unsustainable sub-contractors surviving thanks to the accumulation of rapidly forgotten "projects". Our salvation depends on nothing else than re-inventing our "trajectories" in a shared political space, beyond the dictatorship of nationalisms.

2 - We take good note that the growing political divide nowadays has its roots in the falsification of History, in any region of the world, here as well. Although it is never 100% achieved, Art as a witness for truth has an immense responsibility.

3 - We ought to project ourselves in the future, refusing the dictatorship of immediacy, and look for long term multi-level solutions. The MENA region knows full well that sometimes quick solutions turn into long term problems.

4 - We acknowledge that the notion of common good is wide, transversal, holistic and flexible. It is an on-going construction process. There is no dogma on what common goods are or should be. As indicated in their name, common goods belong to everybody and to no one person in particular.

5 - We move in multiple and administratively overlapping spaces, which in many ways no longer respond to the classic neo-colonial approach of the so-called Euro-Mediterranean space. The Arab cultural world is far larger than the Mediterranean Sea, and it cannot be considered isolated from the entire Middle-East. What is happening today in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Kurdistan, etc...is evidence of this.

Therefore, an attempt to express some medium and long term tendencies in economy, in politics and in the humanistic sphere is necessary:

a) Economy:

a1) Agile, flexible, transversal, multi-functional light-weight content industries will replace vertically-organised heavy-weight ones.

According to many specialists, content industries (multi-media, internet, communication, leisure, culture and online education) may become the first economic asset in the world in the next 50 years, following the decline of fossil fuels. Some petrol states have already begun to launch initiatives in this perspective. Global investment funds are already spending huge sums; for example, Providence Equity Fund published on their website, a plan to invest 50 billions dollars in global media, education and culture (they are already the owners of Warner). These global players are already attempting to rule our game.

However, this also means that funds dedicated to Culture will increase and thus, paradoxically, agile, hyper-active networks of lighter content industries, running on peer-to-peer relationship models, will be able to strengthen their new markets since these will not be considered interesting enough financially by what I call "the monstrous military-industrial empires". These lighter content industries will still keep their leadership on R&D, on innovation, on creativity, but they have to quickly organise their independence from the big heavyweight industries. In this regard, skilled negotiators in the Cultural sector will be highly necessary.

Contrary to the heavyweight industries, these smaller, multi-lateral, instant, horizontal networks of lightweight industries will facilitate inter-cultural dialogue.

a2) The nature of mass-consumption (of which mass-tourism is the most visible aspect in the Med area) and its requirement to constantly be at its maximum efficiency, drives it to separate individuals into different categories up to a point which becomes hard to stand for human beings. The generation gap is a direct consequence of marketing consumption, city planning is directly linked to gentrification, women still have a lot of difficulties to have their human rights respected, etc... Mass-consumption is not only a threat to the environment, it is also a direct threat to intercultural dialogue. More than ever culture, as a platform for dialogue is an utmost priority.

Soberness as a personal form of behaviour as well.

a3) The notion of ethical capitalism, which is by the way directly placed at the intersection of religions and secularism, remains marginal when confronted to profit maximisation. In the current context of global negotiations on economy, ethical capitalism still remains an intellectual speculation, and the absence of ethics in economy has a direct effect on the religious question, including in the most violent theatres of conflict. Censorship is not only political, it is also produced by some forms of economy. Who today is the guardian of ethics, of freedom of expression, of freedom of creation? The legitimate desire of inter-cultural dialogue forces us to re-consider the restrictive control imposed by wild ultra-liberalism.

b) politics:

b1) The influence of cultural (and cultural) zones is gradually replacing the national borders, for the best and for the worst. Trapped in a very old-fashioned "block-against-block" strategy dating from former centuries, the traditional competition between nations is being replaced by the instrumentalization of cultural differences (very often disguised under the term "cultural diplomacy"), by a so-called "shock of civilisations" which is more and more successful, although it is nothing else than a new make-up on the face of nationalism. In MENA region, after the apparent decline of colonial powers, some new regional or religious heavyweights try to occupy the empty chair, become more aggressive, more radical, gain more influence, although the constant and never-ending pressure of the US, Russia and the EU is still there, under new forms. Do these

regional powers consider intercultural dialogue as an essential tool for peace? Do they even consider peace as their number one objective? Or do they prefer their expansion?

No culture, no dialogue... No dialogue, no peace... No peace, no business... War is the business...

b2) Asia shows a growing interest for Africa and the MENA region. The centre of the world has shifted, from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, and now from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Interestingly enough, we Arabs, Europeans, Middle-easterners, do not know that we are collectively seen from China as a single coherent cultural entity, with a common heritage, a common, original religious frame, and somehow common genetics. Is this reciprocal? Do we show interest in the other regions of the world? If yes, what are we collectively interested in? Social models? Market development? The exotic? Spiritualism? Can we collectively address the rest of the world? Isn't the rest of the world expecting us?

b3) hybridation/integration/assimilation

Beyond the fascinating and on-going research of "Cultural Base", a joint programme led by the Universities of Barcelona and Glasgow, the remaining and long-lasting question is: Who is integrating who? Who is assimilating who? What level of hybridisation is compatible with Cultural Diversity?

c) the human factor:

c1) Whatever happens, the Europe of the younger generations, including the ones of immigrant origin, will be based on and will affect the Europe/MENA region relationship. What we can witness today is not the withdrawal of the European dream, but the somehow painful, often anticipated beginnings of a positive transformation, which requires that every single individual living in Europe redefines his/her position towards the rest of the world. This also includes the re-balancing of another north/south-periphery/centre unfair deal, the one internally affecting Europe, between its north and its south, which, by a domino effect, is also weakening the relationship between Europe and the MENA region. The future partners of the younger generations in MENA region are everywhere in Europe, not only in the capital cities.

c2) Whether virtual or physical mobility, the peer-to-peer, transversal, universal approach does not comply with the notion of a one-way, no return ticket.

The "golden triangles" of Art and Culture (for example London/Amsterdam/Paris) are the geographical bases of the empire. They concentrate all the tools of the cultural power. They behave towards the creative youth of the peripheries as magnets. The brain drain effect is their worst consequence. It deprives local communities of the return on the expensive investment that has been made in the education and capacity building of their youth. It prevents the creative youth from participating in the development/reconstruction of its own community, and, on a not-so-long term, it fuels an unfair imbalanced situation, which incidentally nourishes europhobia inside, and xenophobia outside.

Everywhere in the world this "golden triangles" syndrome is growing. It is also the fruit of modern global planning politics.

Local development is the condition for a fair international relationship, the individual is the engine of this development, with his/her cultural and intellectual assets. Mobility is first of all an affair of local development, and cannot be reduced to a small cohort of smart people living in airports. It concerns first of all your ability to share the benefits of your trip with your community when you go back home. I believe that the future of the world will be made of an organic network of multiple peripheries. Peripheries are the multiple sources of knowledge, since knowledge is not the privilege of a few scientific centres wherever they may be, including in the Euro-MENA region.

As a conclusion, I would refer to article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

"All human beings are equal in dignity and in rights".

In my understanding, to be equal in dignity means that there cannot be any dominating Culture.

I thank you for your attention.

Ferdinand Richard, Amman 3 December 2017